SISTERS, I Know.....

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If you think that the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 included the Rights of woman, think again. It was two years later that a woman, Olympe de Gonges, asked, "Hey and our Rights?" She demanded that French women be given the same Rights as French men. In her Declaration of the Rights of women and the French Citizen of 1791, she challenged the practice of male authority and the notion of male-female inequality. Yes that was such a long time ago.

However, misogyny, is introjected in our society and does not respect sex, nationality, socio-economic and educational status, sexual orientation, colour of skin, religion or age. It is in the air we breathe. Our hope lies in our youth, both women and men, who believe in justice and equality and denounce: poverty, racisms, sexism, slavery, and all expressions of injustice in our society. Social and cultural changes are possible and begin in the minds of people willing to transform our world.

There are many myths and misleading information concerning violence towards women. So it is important to know the following basic points:

If you are a woman or a man, the only right attitude towards a person who is a victim of sexual abuse, is to listen, believe and be on their side; never make fun of them or underestimate their pain.

In this situation the perpetrator is the guilty party, not the victim. Few women denounce this abuse for fear of being victimized yet again by a society that blames them. Ah, but also young girls and children who stay at home, in the care of a relative, a cousin, father stepfather, uncle, aunt or neighbour are also at risk. Are they guilty?

A rapist, a pedophile, a perpetrator of crimes against women and girls is not a victim of his uncontrollable impulses. We are all responsible for our actions.

No means No.

A minor cannot consent.

Verbal sexual harassment (including unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, whistling, leering or making obscene gestures), sexual abuse and rape are expressions of power over women and girls. It's objective is to subjugate women since childhood and make them feel fear, shame and humiliation.

If you are a man (or woman) and see your friends incur in acts of violence against someone, do not turn a blind eye, stop them denounce them or defend and assist their victims.

If you are a woman (or man) and are a victim of sexual abuse, know that it is not your fault and speak out and denounce the abuser. Seek help. You are not alone.

The persistence of violence against women and girls and the permissible attitude towards them is disheartening but does not stop us from speaking out and denouncing the abuse. The first step in ending violence against women is to be aware of the existence of violence and be empathetic towards the victims. Change will not occur overnight, but a change in the attitude of the youth towards violence against women and girls is our most powerful instrument. Each and every individual has the power to eradicate violence against women and girls by supporting and empowering one woman at a time.