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Vigal against gender violence

THE Women's Aid Organisation has joined the 16 Days Activism Against Gender Violence, an annual global campaign to raise awareness of all forms of violence against women.

"We have taken part in the global campaign since 1998," says WAO executive director Ivy Joisiah. "Since then we've done something different every year."

This year, the campaign involves the launch of the International Day Against Violence Against Women at the Pasar Seni Putra LRT station in Kuala Lumpur. It was officiated last week by Malaysian AIDS Foundation chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, a WAO member. She and a group of volunteers handed out brochures in Bahasa Malaysia and English at the event.

The same brochures were also distributed in conjunction with World AIDS Day last Saturday.

Other campaign activities include the distribution of helpline cards at ticket counters at all LRT stations. Posters designed by Ogilvy One Worldwide that read "Don't turn your back on VAW" have also been put up at all stations as well as at Levi Strauss outlets nationwide. Donation boxes for WAO have also been set up at Levi Strauss outlets in Selangor and KL.

"All this is possible because Levi Strauss & Co gave RM88,160 for this public education campaign," says Josiah. "This campaign is necessary because public education has to be constant and repetitive. There are still people who think it is the woman's fault when she is raped, beaten or sexually harassed.

"We have to change public thinking, to tell men and boys not to hurt women. We have to stop asking why women get raped and beaten and start asking instead why men rape and beat."

As part of the campaign, interviews with the electronic and print media will be held throughout the 16 days. This is in line with the aim of educating the public on violence against women and human rights through various media channels.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in 1991.

Participants chose the dates: Nov 25, International Day Against Violence Against Women, and Dec 10, International Human Rights Day, in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasise that such violence is a violation of human rights.

This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including World AIDS Day and Dec 6, which marks the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre.

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