

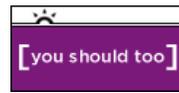
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SISTAS FIRED UP OVER VIOLENCE

BY ALBOR RUIZ

Sunday, March 7th 2004, 7:11AM

"I live in East Flatbush, where a young black woman, Ramona Moore, was abducted, raped and killed a few months ago," said a bitter Nicole Burrowes, herself a young woman of color. "She was found a few blocks from the local precinct."

According to Burrowes, no serious police action was ever taken, despite the fact that Moore's family filed a missing-person report.

Moore's case and hundreds of others like it are the main reason why International Women's Day, celebrated tomorrow all over the world, will not be a joyous day for Burrowes and Sista II Sista, a Brooklyn-wide grass-roots community organization of working-class black and Latina women based in Bushwick. Instead, the group will use the occasion to remind everyone that violence against women is a horrible, everyday reality - and that it must end.

That is why Sisterfire, a national cultural arts tour that will bring the issues of violence against women of color to people in over 15 cities across the country, will be launched on International Women's Day.

The tour will include music, dance, video, hip hop, spoken word and other forms of art to express the reality faced by women from Juárez, Mexico, to L.A., New Orleans and New York City. Here, Sista II Sista and other women's community organizations will host the tour.

"The tour will hit New York City from June 17-19, and will be an opportunity for our communities to join the movement to stop all forms of violence against women of color and our communities," said Paula X. Rojas, a Sista II Sista member. "Some of the issues that will be explored are police and INS abuse and police negligence in cases of sexual and domestic violence against poor women of color."

Sisterfire is far from the first initiative undertaken by the Brooklyn women. In the summer of 2002, Sista II Sista began working on a solidarity campaign to raise consciousness about the hundreds of brutal murders of women in Juárez. They gathered more than 350 petitions demanding that the Mexican government take action. Yet two years have gone by and young, poor women are still being murdered with total impunity.

All the victims - about 400 since 1993 - have been young, and most came to Juárez full of hope, searching for work and a better life. Instead, they found violence and death.

"Every time I leave home," said a young Juárez woman recently on TV, "I'm afraid I won't be coming back."

Most of the victims - at least six of them American citizens - were abducted in broad daylight, raped, tortured and brutally murdered in that rough-and-tumble Mexican town across the border from El Paso, Texas.

Yet, almost unbelievably, Mexican authorities have not been able to stop the massacre. More bodies of young women keep turning up every week.

"We think there is negligence on the part of the authorities," Rojas said. "Even worse, we believe that the Juárez police are probably involved in the killings and disappearances of the women."

Mexican women's groups are scared and outraged by what they call the inability - or unwillingness - of their country's authorities to put a stop to the killings.

Rojas said that Sista II Sista feels a special kinship with the Juárez women.

"We believe that here in Bushwick, there also is official negligence in regards to violence against women, especially young women," Rojas said.

Priscila Torres, an 18-year-old Sista II Sista organizer, agrees.

"I'm fighting to stop violence against young women because, just like in Juárez, if you are a young woman of color in a poor community, you don't get the same attention or protection as a young woman from a rich or white community."

Rojas proclaimed, "On this International Women's Day, we say that not one more woman should die in Juarez. The authorities must put an end to the violence against

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