

## UNITED NATIONS BRIEFING:

On Wednesday, November 28, approximately 40 AAUW members, including 7 from Kingston, joined with the League of Women Voters in a Briefing at United Nations Headquarters in New York City on “The Effects of War on Women Around the World”..

Xandra Kayden of the LWVUS pointed out that in 1900 5% of war casualties were civilians; by 2000 this had increased to 75%. Sylvia Hordosch of the Social Affairs Office of the United Nations reported that increased violence against women often precedes armed conflict. Sexual violence against women is an increasingly common part of war itself, and it does not automatically end with a ceasefire. In peace negotiations women’s issues are often ignored or postponed. Women’s security depends on the rule of law, democracy, equity, education, and opportunity.

Donna Bhagwandin, Gender Advisor in the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that sexual violence is used as a deliberate tactic of war and also occurs when there is a complete breakdown of order, as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Sudan. The UN Initiative against Sexual Violence in Conflict, involving 12 UN agencies, is working to stop the spread of sexual violence from one conflict to other conflicts. The UN is raising awareness to make this a priority; coordinating action within countries; and accumulating data to use for early warning, prevention, and protection.

Violence has its roots in discrimination. A change of attitude is needed in the media and in the community. The data indicates that when top civilian and military leaders come out publicly against sexual violence and state that perpetrators will be punished, it sets the standard. A legislative framework complying with human rights, an effective police force, and a modern judicial system are all essential for enforcement.