STATEMENT ON CASES AGAINST DOMINIQUE STRAUSS-KAHN
IN THE U.S. AND IN FRANCE

WOMEN’S GROUPS CALL FOR JUSTICE IN CASES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

We the undersigned advocates for women’s rights and human rights, stand in solidarity with the woman we call “Hawa”, the unnamed complainant in the recent sexual assault case against former International Monetary Fund head Dominique Strauss-Kahn. We also stand in solidarity with Tristane Banon, who pressed charges yesterday against Strauss-Kahn in France for attempting to rape her in 2003.

Although these two women could not be more different—one is a white French journalist born into a family of privilege and political prominence, the other an immigrant in New York from one of Africa’s poorest countries and a survivor of female genital mutilation like more than 90 percent of the women in Guinea, and child marriage—both have had the courage to come forward to report sexual assaults against them by Strauss-Kahn.

We are outraged by the statements from Strauss-Kahn’s lawyers, the tabloid media, and leaks from unnamed sources from the prosecution attempting to destroy Hawa’s character. They have insidiously succeeded in shifting the focus from the reported act of sexual violence perpetrated by Strauss-Kahn to Hawa’s character. The most vulnerable women and girls in our society — those in conditions of poverty, those who are immigrants, those with limited education, those with histories of sexual abuse and exploitation, those at the margins of our social and economic order — are the least likely to be accorded the protection of our justice system. When a woman reports a case of gender-based violence, her character must not be the focus of debate. The focus should be full access to justice for what happened to her in a court of law.

Tristane Banon is also being accused of fabricating her claim of a violent attempted rape by Strauss-Kahn. It is only a matter of time before the character assassination begins in her case as well. Like countless other victims of sexual assault, Tristane Banon was discouraged from reporting the attempted rape. While evidence of Strauss-Kahn’s attempted rape of Tristane Banon may not be admissible in Hawa’s case, it remains powerful support of Hawa’s claim. The undisputed medical and forensic evidence of Strauss-Kahn’s DNA on the premises and Hawa’s clothing, coupled with her physical injuries, including reported bruises on her genital area and torn clothing, remains a strong indication that sexual violence occurred. Many of us are experts in domestic violence and sexual assault and, as such, have seen repeatedly that men who commit sexual violence against women and girls are almost invariably serial perpetrators.
Fueled by a combination of arrogance, entitlement, and misogyny, these men continue their assaults on women and girls because they are rarely held accountable.

We urge the people of the United States, France, Guinea, and every other country in the world to recognize that violence against women and girls is endemic and ubiquitous, what former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1999 called “perhaps the most shameful human rights violation and the most pervasive.” The World Health Organization reports that between twenty to fifty percent of women and girls suffer gender-based violence. The United Nations Population Fund has described violence against women as "perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations.” Violence against women and girls continues unabated, as the case of Dominique Strauss-Kahn demonstrates, because victims are blamed and silenced and perpetrators more often than not are granted impunity.

We urge the press to cease its irresponsible character attacks on sexual assault victims, which can be psychologically injurious and potentially lethal. For instance, in many traditional societies women who are branded “prostitutes”—whether true or not—can be killed to expunge the stain on their families’ so-called “honor” and could easily provoke acts of violence against them. They must stop.

We call on the Manhattan District Attorney, as well as prosecutors and courts around the world to ensure that Hawa, Tristane Banon, and all other women and girls with the courage to come forward and press charges are treated with sensitivity and respect. Prosecutors must understand that given the requirements, our criminal justice systems and their and society’s longstanding tolerance of violence against women, these cases are difficult to bring, litigate, and win. Prosecutors must anticipate credibility problems with and character attacks of their most vulnerable and marginalized victims and be prepared to understand, defend, and protect them. These are tough cases, but they are essential to ending the culture of impunity that perpetuates violence against women.

On behalf of Hawa, Tristane, and the millions of women like them around the world who have suffered sexual and other forms of gender-based violence and who deserve respect, we demand justice.

Gloria Steinem

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

Equality Now

Louise F. Fitzgerald, PhD

Hollaback!

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The National Dominican Women’s Caucus

Prostitution Research and Education

Sanctuary for Families

The Rebecca Project for Human Rights

SIGNATORY LIST STILL IN FORMATION
INFORMATION & CONTACTS:

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) is a non-governmental organization that promotes women's human rights. It works internationally to combat sexual exploitation in all its forms, especially prostitution and trafficking in women and children, in particular girls.

**Contact:** Norma Ramos, Executive Director -- NRamos@catwinternational.org

Equality Now was founded in 1992 to work for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women around the world. Working with national human rights organizations and individual activists, Equality Now documents violence and discrimination against women and mobilizes international action to support their efforts to stop these human rights abuses.

**Contact:** Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director -- tbien-aime@equalitynow.org

Hollaback! is a movement dedicated to ending street harassment using mobile technology. By collecting women and LGBTQ folks’ stories and pictures in a safe and share-able way, Hollaback! is creating a crowd-sourced initiative to end street harassment. Hollaback! breaks the silence that has perpetuated sexual violence internationally, asserts that any and all gender-based violence is unacceptable, and creates a world where we have an option—and, more importantly—a response.

**Contact:** Emily May, Executive Director -- emily@ihollaback.org

The National Dominican Women’s Caucus (NDWC) is an advocacy organization that addresses issues of women’s rights domestically and globally and ensures the equitable participation of Dominican Women in all aspects of life in the US. NDWC seeks to make a difference for women by establishing an organization that conducts research and analysis of data that can be used to improve our lives.

**Contact:** Zenaida Mendez, President & Founder -- zenaida@ndwc2.org

Prostitution Research and Education (PRE) conducts research on prostitution, pornography and trafficking, and offers education and consultation to researchers, survivors, the public and policymakers. PRE’S goal is to abolish the institution of prostitution while at the same time advocating for alternatives to trafficking and prostitution - including emotional and physical healthcare for women in prostitution.

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The Rebecca Project for Human Rights advocates for justice, dignity and policy reform for vulnerable women and girls in the United States and in Africa. We believe that women and girls possess the right to live free of gendered inequity and violence, and that investment in their leadership creates healthy, safe, and strong communities.

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Sanctuary for Families is the leading nonprofit in New York State dedicated exclusively to serving domestic violence victims, sex trafficking victims, and their children. Each year, Sanctuary helps thousands of victims and their children build safe lives by offering a range of high quality services to meet their complex needs.

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